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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP  
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY  
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE  
TUNIS AND ABU DHABI FOR MEPI OFFICE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [KMPI](#) [QA](#) [ALJAZEERA](#)

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH AL JAZEERA MEDIA TRAINING CENTER  
DIRECTOR

REF: DOHA 1786 AND PREVIOUS

1. (SBU) Summary: PAO met 10/31 with Mahmoud Abdel Hadi, Director of the Al Jazeera Media Training and Development Center located in Doha, now in its second year of operation. Abdel Hadi said the focus of the Center is regional and that 1,500 Arab journalists have participated in the Center's programs this year, with training provided by British and French journalism institutions. The Center has a developing relationship with the University of Missouri's School of Journalism. Abdel Hadi attended MEPI's October 2004 Media Strategies workshop in Abu Dhabi and said the Center is open to cooperation with MEPI. End summary.

2. (SBU) Abdel Hadi reports directly to Al Jazeera Managing Director Wadah Khanfar. A journalist of Palestinian origin, Abdel Hadi came to Doha in 1998 to work for Islam Online. (Note: A popular Islamic affairs website with wide international readership headquartered in Doha, its titular head is Muslim cleric Yusuf Al Qaradawi. End note). He then moved to Al Jazeera where he was instrumental in setting up the Al Jazeera website. In 2003, he began setting up the AJ Training Center, which he has directed since its inception in early 2004.

3. (SBU) Abdel Hadi told PAO the AJ Training and Development Center ("the Center") was formally established in February 2004 and is now approaching the end of its second year. With 20 permanent administrative staff, the Center occupies a leased villa in Doha's Al Sadd neighborhood, pending construction of a permanent site closer to the AJ studios in the Markhiya area of Doha. The Center is well-equipped with state of the art media technology. The Center's mission is regional in scope and it conducts training and consultation activities both in Doha and in other Arab countries. The Center has no training staff of its own but imports trainers on an as-needed basis from various British/French/US journalism institutions. The Center currently has memoranda of understanding with the UK's Thomson Foundation and France's "Ecole Supérieure de Journalisme de Lille," said Abdel Hadi. He said the Center also has a relationship with the University of Missouri's School of Journalism (MU Professor Emeritus Roger Gafke is scheduled to teach a train-the-trainers course at the Center in Doha on November 20) and has recently proposed a memorandum of understanding with Missouri. The Center is also exploring possibility of signing an MOU with Japan's NHK news service. In addition, the Center conducts courses in cooperation with international organizations, such as a recent course in documentary production offered in cooperation with the International Center for Journalism (ICFJ). The Center's language of instruction is English, with interpretation provided as needed for participants.

4. (SBU) According to its promotional brochure, the Center's overall mission is "to contribute to the development of Arab and international media." The Center provides training and consultation in television, radio, print media, e-journalism, media marketing, media planning and media management. Training and consultation take place in Doha but the Center also designs and implements programs in the field. It has conducted extensive training and consultation for Sudan Television, as well as programs in the UAE and Oman. Abdel Hadi says he has visited both Yemen and Djibouti to design programs for their state media operations, although both projects have run into funding problems. The Center is non-profit and structures its fee schedule with the aim of breaking even, so it cannot provide free training, said Abdel Hadi. Training participants are almost exclusively Arab journalists, although the Center once ran a course for journalists from Kyrgyzstan, sponsored and paid for by the Qatar National Charity Association, he said.

5. (U) Abdel Hadi provided the following statistics for the Center: 1,100 participants last year; 1,500 participants this year (in Doha and in the field); 67 courses conducted last year; 105 courses conducted this year; 5 courses conducted outside Qatar last year; 12 courses outside Qatar this year.

The majority of the participants in the first year were Al Jazeera staff, but now most are non-Al Jazeera journalists.

#### MEPI Cooperation?

16. (SBU) Under "Activities of the Center in its first year" AJTDC's promotional brochure prominently mentions the fact that the Center "participated in the workshop organised by the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) on media strategies in the Middle East and North Africa." Abdel Hadi said he much appreciated the strategic approach taken by the 2004 MEPI workshop. He said strategic thinking on media management and reform is much needed in the region, where very often donor countries make disparate and uncoordinated contributions to a problem that really needs a comprehensive strategy. "You end up with lots of workshops here and there, but no results. To be successful with media reform, you have to think strategically," he said. He said the Center is currently cooperating with UNESCO to produce a model media law, for example. Once the model law is completed, the Center would begin to think about strategies for introducing it into Arab countries around the region. There would be opportunities for cooperation with programs such as MEPI here, he said. Other opportunities for cooperation with MEPI might include assisting the implementation of programs for poorer countries in the region, such as the one designed by the Center for Djibouti, which is currently stalled for lack of resources, he added.

#### Problems of the Arab media

17. (SBU) Despite minor differences from country to country, the state of the Arab media is pretty much the same throughout the region, said Abdel Hadi. To a great extent, the Arab media is still stuck in the old mindframe which operated on the assumption that the national audience could be controlled through the state media. This is no longer the case, he said. The national audience has become internationalized, but media managers in Arab countries are failing to acknowledge and to deal with this change. They do not understand the mission or the responsibility of the media and continue to produce programming under the old paradigm, which views state media as a propaganda apparatus for the government and not a medium for monitoring government performance. "The irony is, they are not meeting the goals of their government by doing this," he said. Current media managers do not undertake studies to analyze their effectiveness in reaching their audience and never ask "Should we offer a new proposal to the state?" he said. If, for example, you find that you are spending 10 million dollars to reach five percent of the national audience, and those five percent are merely watching the main news bulletin, "you have to recalculate. You should even consider 'to be or not to be' -- should we continue to exist?" But this does not happen in the Arab world, he said. Media managers simply want to keep their jobs and don't want to make changes that could jeopardize their jobs and the status quo.

18. (SBU) Abdel Hadi noted that there is a definite generational gap among Arab journalists. In many cases, it's too late for the older generation, he said. Changing mindsets requires a sweeping removal of old ideas, and this is not easy to accomplish. "It can be very discouraging to work with older journalists, but what a joy to work with the younger ones!" Abdel Hadi said. About 40 percent of the participants who go through the Center are in their 30s or younger, and these are the future of Arab journalism, he observed. Some of them are discouraged when they return to their home countries and are stopped from implementing what they have learned by the older generation of managers, so the Center tries to run a parallel track, reaching out to both journalists and to their managers, to inculcate universally accepted standards of journalism, said Abdel Hadi.

#### Pilgrimage visas for Al Jazeera staff

19. (SBU) Abdel Hadi noted in passing that it is next to impossible for Al Jazeera staff to obtain Saudi visas to perform Umra (the minor pilgrimage to Mecca) as private citizens and that they also face significant difficulties in getting regular Hajj pilgrimage visas from the Saudis.

#### Al Jazeera Radio - 107.7 FM

10. (U) Abdel Hadi mentioned that live sound track for Al Jazeera TV is available via FM radio in Doha on 107.7 FM, which has proved to be the case, although signal quality is somewhat choppy.

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